



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pete Harckham

Harckham Announces “Traveling with Dignity” Legislation

PETE HARCKHAM November 6, 2023

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State Sen. Pete Harckham with (l-r) Karl Rohde, State Sen. Robert Rolison, Diego Ortiz, Penny-Lynn Pagliaro and Betty Williams

Brewster, NY – New York State Sen. Pete Harckham announced today that he has introduced new legislation, the “Traveling with Dignity Act,” at a special press conference held with leaders from Constructive Partnerships Unlimited (CP Unlimited) and members of the disability community.

The “Traveling with Dignity Act” ([S.7697](#)) will provide for adult changing facilities to be placed within an enclosed restroom facility or other similar private facility to be made available for persons with disabilities, veterans, seniors or other individuals in public rest areas, museums, libraries and government-owned facilities throughout the state.

State Sen. Robert Rolison from Senate District 39 and Karl Rohde, director of Putnam County Veterans Service Agency, also joined Harckham at the press conference, which was held at CP Unlimited Hudson Valley Division’s headquarters here. To see a video of the press conference, click [here](#).

“People with differing abilities should be able to participate in the same activities, day trips and excursions that are available to everybody, and the best way to effectuate this is to provide as many adult changing areas and disability-friendly rest areas as possible,” said Harckham. “This common-sense legislation simply focuses on these accommodations, which will benefit residents and visitors alike. By providing safer, more sanitary spaces for caregivers and family members to aid adults in need of assistance, we are also elevating the respect and dignity these community members are well deserving of.”

Harckham noted the legislation, which will impact people born with disabilities, seniors and veterans with traumatic injuries, was informed and prompted by conversations with CP Unlimited advocates and direct support professionals on issues around dignity, access and inclusion that people with I/DD (intellectual and developmental disabilities) experience when attending large gatherings and events at public facilities. CP Unlimited is a nonprofit organization that grew out of Cerebral Palsy Associations of New York State (CP of NYS), which provides a wide range of programs and support for people with I/DD.

CP Unlimited officials related to Harckham that many of its clients with disabilities were unable to make a trip to Albany because of restricted access to changing tables along the

Thruway and in the State Capitol.

“Frankly, I was saddened and ashamed to learn of this,” said Harckham.

Penny-Lynn Pagliaro, executive director of CP Unlimited Hudson Valley Division, said, “CP Unlimited was founded to help people with disabilities achieve fulfilling lives. The ‘Traveling with Dignity Act’ advances that vision by ensuring that the people we support, and others throughout New York, can more fully access and enjoy public events and programs. We thank Senator Harckham for his initiative putting forth this important, inclusive legislation.”

Too often, caregivers and family members experience the reality of having to provide personal care of an I/DD adult on the floor of a public restroom or some other inconvenient and unsanitary space because an adequate changing station is not available. This leads to circumstances and conditions often lacking privacy and cleanliness that are also embarrassing.

Adult-size changing tables and hoists in family restrooms can usually accommodate individuals weighing upwards of 400 lbs., allowing people with disabilities to travel more freely. Harckham added that once his legislation is enacted and public spaces make adult changing facilities available, then businesses and other private facilities will follow suit.

Currently, other states with laws similar to Harckham’s “Traveling with Dignity Act” include Arizona, California, Michigan and Pennsylvania.

Sen. Rolison said, “I applaud Senator Harckham for bringing this bill forward, and I plan to be a co-sponsor. As a society, we need to do everything we can to provide access to changing stations for the disability community so that they have an opportunity to travel everywhere possible and lead full lives. When we learned of the challenges preventing district residents

and others from traveling to Albany to meet with their elected representatives face to face, we knew something had to be done. I intend to continue to work in a bipartisan way in order to get this measure passed in the legislature and enacted into law.”

Karl Rohde said, “Veterans, who cannot travel without certain accommodations due to injuries they received during their service, will benefit from this legislation. We have events here in the Hudson Valley that, unfortunately, we are not able to bring some of our veterans to because of a lack of changing stations along the way.”

Two of CP Unlimited Hudson Valley Division’s Wappingers Falls residents spoke at the press conference as well.

When given an invitation to an event, the first thing that comes to Betty Williams’s mind is that she will need a changing table, or she won’t be able to attend. “I have to be changed every two hours,” she noted. And Diego Ortiz said there needs to be changing tables in public restrooms, especially at hotels. In one hotel up in Albany, he recalled having to get out of his wheelchair and crawl over to the toilet. “That was tough for me,” he said. “I did it, but it was hard.”